

UCU Yorks & Humber Regional Bulletin

16 April 2020

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COVID-19 BULLETIN

In what has been an unprecedented few weeks, UCU members across Yorkshire and Humberside are now going through the biggest period of uncertainty and change in practice that all FE and HE sectors have ever seen.

Colleges and Universities have had to close sites rapidly and completely rethink their delivery models. Our members have responded brilliantly under what can only be described as very challenging circumstances. When all of this is over, we hope that VCs and Principals across the region remember that it is the dedication and resilience of the staff that has carried their institutions through these turbulent times.

The Yorkshire and Humberside regional office is providing dedicated support to branch officers and members to ensure that local negotiations are taking place in regards to the various steps employers are taking in response to the crisis. We

seek to identify rogue employers forcing staff to take holidays, micromanaging staff working from home, who are still forcing staff to attend premises, who are ploughing ahead with non-urgent casework and those threatening redundancy or lay-offs. Where this is happening the union will act to protect members.

Over the coming weeks, months, and perhaps well into next year we will be doing all we can to make sure that you are kept abreast of all the latest developments with legal updates, industrial relations, working practice across the region and the health and safety implications of the new paradigm that we now find ourselves in.

We have already, with the help of local branch officers, run a survey on the various measures that employers have taken in response to the crisis, collated responses, and shared the results with Yorkshire and Humberside branch officers. This has helped establish a library of best and worst

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practice across the sectors in the region and the data will help inform our future negotiating and campaigning positions in regard to protecting you.

Many employers in their haste to impose new working arrangements rushed through changes and made quick decisions by-passing union input. If we accept that this has been a time of emergency there is now an opportunity to reflect and for employers to fully engage with their recognised unions regarding these new working arrangements and future proposals.

We have also been providing regular updates on the Government's Job Retention Scheme,

Job Retention Scheme and Furloughed Workers

If you have any indication that you might be furloughed you must contact your local branch for further advice. We expect to be fully consulted over such a scheme. An employer must have your agreement to furlough you. You will remain employed and all your terms and conditions should be protected allowing you to return to your normal role with no detriment.

So far the University of Sheffield UCU branch have agreed a deal with their University to furlough their casualised workforce. We anticipate that this will protect the pay of about a thousand staff members. Grimsby Institute has also furloughed about 80 staff mainly in support roles and has protected pay at 100%.

You can find the latest Government guidance by clicking [here](#)

Holidays

Whilst it is understandable that institutions will try and ensure that staff do not save entitlements until later in the year it is equally unfair for them to force the front loading of holidays. Leeds College of Building and Selby College are the only employers who are trying this tactic at the moment. They are clearly outliers and we are currently challenging them on their actions. Please refer to your contracts and policies and insist that they are adhered to and not arbitrarily ignored. Contact your officials if you need support regarding this.

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enforced annual leave, dealing with casework, risk assessments, homeworking and best practice to maintain good mental health. If you have questions on these issues please get in touch with either the regional office or local officers.

The main messages now is to look after yourself enjoy the spring sunshine, and if possible take a break! Keep your local branch officers updated with good or bad practice. You are the union and together we can protect you and all of your fellow workers by keeping the union strong.

You can keep up to date with all the latest news and developments within the sector by visiting UCU.ORG.UK

Restructures and Redundancies

It seems that Leeds Beckett University still insist on ploughing ahead with restructuring and redundancy despite our attempts to try and halt it for the time being. Apparently, the Olympics can be postponed but not this! In the context of the crisis this is ridiculous, the additional stress and anxiety this creates for those potentially facing redundancy is, in the union's view is not only unnecessary but also heartless.

Other employers in the region are taking a much more humane approach such as the University of Hull, who have agreed with campus unions that they will halt redundancy processes for 12 weeks, and York College who have agreed to pause a restructure until everyone is back at work.

Are Your Details Up To Date?

We all move house and move jobs over our careers, and letting your trade union know your new contact details probably isn't at the top of your list during these life events. However, should you need assistance at work, or should your branch need to make you aware of important developments in your workplace, it's important that UCU can contact you when we need to. With 'My UCU' you can update your details online so that you'll never miss out on important news that's developing in your workplace. You can register for 'My UCU' by clicking [here](#)

Working From Home And Online Teaching

We are still watching this carefully and are aware that some of the systems that Colleges and Universities are using enable managers to track online activity. We will challenge any examples of managers using these systems as an opportunity to spy on staff or use this opportunity in a manner that could be detrimental to members. At the beginning of this period a couple of FE Colleges (who will remain nameless) decided they needed staff to fill in timesheets reporting on how they were spending their day. With swift action from their local officers however this was nipped in the bud.

It is important that you understand on what basis you are providing lectures to your students. For example:

- does your institution have an established lecture capture policy negotiated with UCU?
- is there agreement that any material you have made in response to the COVID-19 crisis will not be used once institutions get back to normal?
- does your institution accept that you own the

Branch Communications

As more staff are working from home and in isolation the need for branches to maintain its links with members grows greater.

We're asking all branches in the region to let us know by email how they are maintaining links between the branch committee members and the wider membership throughout this period. It may be that you are using email to stay in touch with your members and using WhatsApp to hold discussions amongst branch officers. Whichever model you have adopted could you please let us know the following:

1. How are you communicating with branch members and how often?
2. How are you holding discussions between branch officers and how often?
3. How are you communicating with the employer and how often?

Please send you responses to Rob Crowther at rcrowther@ucu.org.uk

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copyright on your lectures or other teaching materials?

- what data does the online platform you are using obtain about you or your students?

If you are in doubt about any of these questions, ask your immediate line manager and if you are concerned at their response raise these issues with your local UCU branch.

More information for members on home working, online teaching such as ACAS advice and HSE guidance, can be found in the bulletin on the UCU website. We will also post this bulletin on the UCU Y&H Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Click [here](#) for UCU Working From Home Bulletin

Click [here](#) for ACAS Guidance

Click [here](#) for HSE Guidance

Claim Tax Relief For Working From Home

Did you know that you can claim tax relief for working from home home?

Click [here](#) to see if you're able to make a claim.

Write To Your MP

As well as the obvious health implications, the current COVID-19 crisis is creating huge financial uncertainty for staff and students in post-16 education.

UCU has written to the secretary of state for education calling for urgent action to mitigate the risk of losing vital academic capacity across the system at just the time when it will be needed most.

The link below will take you to a UCU webpage which will firstly help you to find your MP by simply inserting your postcode, and will then give you the option of writing your own letter or using the pre-written template.

Please add your voice and take the time to write to your local MP by clicking [here](#) to ask for their help in ensuring post-16 education is not negatively impacted by the current crisis.

**STAY AT HOME
PROTECT THE NHS
SAVE LIVES**



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